DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 306 606 CS 506 561

AUTHOR Swanson, Charles H.
TITLE Speak Out for Listening.
PUB DATE Mar 89
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Listening Association (10th, Atlanta, GA, March 1-4, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advocacy; Communication (Thought Transfer); Communication Skills; Elementary Secondary Education; *Listening; Listening Comprehension; *Listening Skills; Social Action

ABSTRACT

There are two possible explanations about why listening is such an overlooked skill. First, as a skill, listening suffers from automaticity, the operational nature of skills that are used without conscious thought to achieve a goal. Second, there is no word which specifically identifies an inability to listen. "Illistenacy" is a term that can identify the inability to voluntarily control attention so as to understand nonwritten messages of varying degrees of complexity, in a consistent fashion over extended periods of time. The key symptom in "illistenacy" is a dependence on involuntary attention, and a lack of ability to control voluntary attention. In order to get those who make decisions, legislators, school boards, administrators, even teachers, to understand the importance of listening, the use of advocacy is necessary. Advocacy means that it is necessary to determine who gets the message, set realistic goals, develop a campaign, build contacts, organize a calendar, and establish an action plan. Establishing and maintaining the place of listening in the vocabulary and consciousness of society is an ongoing process, not the magical act of one brilliant voice on one grand day in the sun. Listening may find its place in the paradigm or myth of society more quickly through a carefully planned advocacy. (MS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED306606

Speak out *FOR* Listening

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Charles Swanson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BY

Charles H. Swanson
Professor and Coordinator
Department of Speech Communication and Theatre
Fairmont State College
Fairmont, WV 26554

for the

International Listening Association
Tenth Annual Convention
Westin Hotel
Atlanta, Georgia

March 1-4, 1989

CS506561

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

How can we get people who have not been taught to listen to listen about listening?

Two points are on my agenda this morning. First, we must recognize why those of us interested in listening form such a tiny minority on planet Earth. Second, we must learn how we act must in order to change the prevailing condition.

During the past sixty years, listening has been described variously as the overlooked skill: an orphan, secret, lost, least understood, underdeveloped, most used and least taught, invisible, forgotten, neglected and just plain ignored. Consequently, listening remains the un-skill -- undefined, unmentioned, unexamined, untaught, unlearned and unvalued.

In fact, listening lacks a place in the vocabulary or "reality" of the vast majority of humans inhabiting this planet. Whether you are describing a paradigm in systems thinking terms, or a Jungian myth in psychological terms, the inability of most people to even speak about listening in a meaningful fashion illustrates what Sam Keen recently described as a myth:

> A myth involves a conscious celebration of certain values, . . . (it) also includes an unconscious, habitual way of seeing things, an invisible stew of unquestioned assumptions. A living myth, like an iceberg, is only 10 percent visible; 90 percent lies beneath the surface of consciousness of those who live by it. (Psychology Today, December 1988, pp. 44 - 47)

What those of us involved in the International Listening Association face is a pervading myth, or paradigm, without a place for listening.

Over those same sixty years, many of us have speculated about the reasons for this lack of attention. Wolvin and Coakley summarized a number of hidden assumptions which are reasons for the pervading neglect of listening in school curricula including:

1. a self-perpetuating lack of effective listening models from which the majority of people might learn how to listen,
2. a cultural dominance of the eye, especially in reading, which affects how and what we perceive,
3. the difficulty of detecting deficiencies in listening,
4. the belief that hearing acuity and intelligence determine listening ability,
5. the assumption that practice and intelligence are the only significant components of listening,
6. an already overcrowded school curricula,
7. the assumption that development of listening ability is automatic, requiring no instruction.

Today I want to suggest two other possible explanations for this peculiar deafness about listening.

First, as a skill, listening suffers from <u>automaticity</u>; automaticity describes the operational nature of skills in

that we use them automatically, without conscious thought, to achieve a goal. Since listening is the first acquired communication skill, most people have used whatever ability to listen they have without attention to how they use or misuse that skill for so long that they cannot identify their own errors.

A second explanation for the perpetual inattention to listening is best illustrated by the following test.

Fill in the following blanks:

1. A person who has difficulty speaking is called _____.
2. A person who cannot speak is called or _____.
3. A person who cannot read or write is call _____.
4. A person who cannot hear a full range of sounds is called _____.
5. A person who cannot hear is called _____.
6. And, a person who cannot listen is called _____.

There is no word which specifically identifies an inability to listen. Thus, I believe, the pervasive deafness about listening which we face is perpetuated by the lack of a label identifying the inability to listen. If there is no negative condition to cure, no villain to defeat, there is nothing of significance or concern. Only when our world identifies something as wrong -- an illness, a villain or a crisis -- will listening receive its appropriate value.

Some advocates for listening want to speak of listening literacy or illiteracy. While attaching listening the the literacy/illiteracy movement has some merit, I find no comfort in listening literacy. Literacy is so completely identified with the ability to read and write in the public mind that listening literacy would confuse an already confused world.

Thus, I am offering the term, ILLISTENACY, as a term identifying the inability to voluntarily control attention and understand to nonwritten messages of varying degrees of complexity, in a consistent fashion over extended periods of time. The key symptom in illistenacy is a dependence on involuntary attention, and a lack of ability to control voluntary attention.

Furthermore, I am arguing that until we establish ILLISTENACY, or another negative term, as a part of the world's vocabulary, the deafness about listening will continue unabated. [I might note that we are still seeing and hearing the last phase of a twenty million dollar media campaign on literacy/illiteracy which is not an accident or a spontaneous happening. The illness or the villain is ILLITERACY.]

While there many be room to argue about the term, or its definition, we must constantly use such a term to establish the place of listening in the conscious reality of an otherwise deaf world.

Perhaps later we can argue about ILLISTENACY.

Now I must address the second topic which may be even more unpleasant to most people. As a matter of fact, until I finally heard about listening in 1979, I, too, fastidiously avoided politics and ADVOCACY. However, when I discovered listening, I discovered the deafness of our world. Then, I had to plunge, somewhat timidly, into the quagmire of the political world.

Imagine the shock to my innocence when I discovered that legislators, school boards, administrators and even teachers would not hear my reasoned appeals about the importance of listening. Everyone said, "Yes, it is important that people listen (but what else is new?)." Teachers continue to teach as though their students already know all they need to know about listening. School curricula continue to neglect listening instruction as though Johnny already knows how to listen. School boards would nod their heads and then worry about the 3R's, and budgets, buildings or bus schedules. Legislators stand four square in favor of God, mother, apple pie, and listening. Still, very few people really listen about listening.

Now, the fact is that politics is the process through which decisions about action and the expenditure of money are made. When the political world does not see an issue or problem as important, there is little or no action.

Aware of that fact, I began to realize that, like it or not, I must become an active advocate for listening. As I

began to study how to become a more effective advocate for listening, I blithely skipped over one warning -- when you become an advocate, you are grabbing the tail of a tiger; the only way off is defeat. And I have this streak of Swedish stubbornness in me ....

I discovered that talking to decision-makers only about listening was futile. (People need to attach something new to a place in their own reality.) Thus I concluded that talking about listening and speaking as basic skills in effective oral communication made more connections for decision-makers, especially after P.L. 95-561, the Education Amendments of 1978, which recast the legal definition of basic skills. Citing a federal law is one of the most certain ways to catch a decision-maker's attention.

What follows is a compilation of what I learned to use as an advocate for the skill of listening. What I learned, I used in a state governmental context. I believe that the national context is similar.

HOW DO YOU GET THE STATE/FEDERAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO REQUIRE SPEAKING AND LISTENING INSTRUCTION IN ALL OF THE HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE STATE/NATION?

The process is a political action known as "advocacy". Advocacy is a process, not a singular magical act. No one person will stand up and give one persuasive speech, or write one persuasive essay, and have the proposed action occur instantly.

[Point: The federal Department of Education has a Basic Skills Program office which handles millions of dollars in basic skills research and instructional programming money. If anyone could figure out that office's expenditure per skill, I doubt that even five percent of the available basic skills money was spent on listening research or instruction.]

To create a context for this material -- since few people can conceive of listening without speaking, or vica versa, I have chosen to focus on both listening and speaking. Most of the interactionists I know of are working with sender/source models which rarely acknowledge the listener/receiver as more than a body present. So too, here is another point of discussion or debate. But, let's move ahead.

Advocacy takes TIME and PATIENCE .... because it won't happen quickly or easily. Again... and again... and again....

Advocacy takes PERSISTENCE... Trying again...and again....

Advocacy takes PEOPLE. In political events, numbers count! At certain times, <u>numbers are critical</u>.

Those numbers must speak in consensus: if each individual has his or her own proposal (and will support no one else), the targets will not act because you (you-all) don't know what you (you-all) want. But, those messages cannot be written on ditto paper or xeroxed. <u>Everyone must make the same points</u>, each in his or her own way, in his/her own handwriting.

Advocacy takes ENERGY and the ABILITY TO DROP EVERYTHING WHILE YOU RUSH TO GET SOMETHING DONE YESTERDAY. It helps to be a "true believer". If you are working for merit points or a "professional activities credit," forget advocacy; there are lots of other professional association committees requiring less time and effort.

You don't have to be crazy, but it helps. Keep a sense of humor; it's essential for survival.

Advocacy requires LEARNING. LEARN everything you need and everything you can. Knowledge is power ... really! Learn about advocacy, about influence, about the system, about the bureaucracy, about networking. Learn about people: which people you can count on to act, to make excuses, or to subvert any action. Learn to think creatively about any angle which will promote your association and your action-goal.

BUMPERSTICKERS ANYONE?

There is a powerful article on educators and politicians by Samuel Halperin ("Politicians and Educators: Two World Views," Phi Delta Kappan 56 (November 1974), 189-190.) which you must read. You must know your targets (who you are trying to influence) and yourself. We educators have this tendency to be "holier-than-thou", and to treat politician as a dirty word. (I'll try to include a copy of that article if I haven't given all my copies away.) Teaching and politicking are both dirty jobs, but somebody has to do them.

Advocacy is a POLITICAL ACTION. You're liable to end up in the mud of reality, wrestling directly and indirectly with a lot of other advocates and a lot of power merchants. You have to know what you want; and you have to know when and how to compromise.

BY AN INCREDIBLE AMOUNT OF WORK ....

Will President Bush put federal money where his mouth is about education? What kinds of educational programming will develop? Who will make those decisions?

FIND OUT WHO <u>REALLY</u> DECIDES.

Find out what is really going on, <u>now</u>, in the DOE (state/federal department of education) and in the BOE (state Board of Education). Do they have a newsletter or newspaper? Do you know people on your campuses and in your schools who are currently working with either body (DOE or BOE). Find out what those bodies are really doing. Find out how things are done, actions are really developed and made over long periods of time usually.

Find people (principals, superintendents, deans, chairman) who can and will recommend you and/or your Association colleagues to work with state/federal committees, panels, publications, etc..

Find out who in the state/federal DOE is the most logical connection between your interest and his/her interest -- speech specialist, language arts specialist, basic skills specialist, general or special curriculum supervisor .... Make a contact and develop a relationship whenever possible.

Find out the entire span of state (the fed is a Gordian Knot) DOE personnel who might be involved in a decision concerning your action-goal. (Keep a notebook for all your advocacy information.) Start with the state superintendent, and work down the entire curriculum line and staff in the DOE.

-- Identify the position title, the current holder's name, office mailing address, phone number, and any other information you can find about each person. Include each person's major academic degree (recognizing an individual with a reading degree might explain that person's deafness).

-- Eventually, some of these people (not always on top) will be more important than others. For certain mailing actions, I would mail paper to everyone. You must know the chain-of-command.

Identify, as best you can, everyone in any position in the state/federal DOE who might be interested or involved in your target/goal Are there any people in the DOE who are trained in your area? Maybe, they will be sympathetic.

Find out how much your association can afford to spend on mailing, phone calls, travel, printing..... it will never be enough. Who in your group can get these things done with their monies? Some members may have access to state/federal WATTS lines. Others may have access to secretarial support. Still others may have access to printing. (Crucial public statements should be printed whenever possible. Ditto's make a poor image.)

If your association has a newsletter, get it printed [printed matter creates an image of more authority]. Mail out copies to as many people as you can. The Association must work constantly on VISIBILITY. People with influence and power must see your Association's work.

(Now, remember, you're doing all of this at once. Divide and delegate. Then, everyone shares in what you find. This is no time for "I've got a secret.")

Find someone with access to a computer with a label-making program. Set up as many runs as your association can afford:

1. association members,
2. DOE & BOE personnel,
3. newspaper & media editors (as many as possible),
4. related association officials: e.g., state education association, state teachers' union, state Teachers of English, state superintendents' association, state Principals' Association, state Guidance Counselors' Association, state Theatre Association, and all the state associations for related business interests,
5. all members of legislative (House & Senate) committees on education and finance, include the doorkeepers to both legislative chambers,
6. county/district superintendents,
7. high school principals,
8. junior high/middle school principals,
9. elementary principals.

Include labels to everything and everyone your association can <u>afford</u>.

---------- DETERMINE YOUR GOAL(S) ----------

BY CONSENSUS, COMMITTEE OR DEFAULT ... WORK OUT <u>REALISTIC GOALS</u> AND, IF NECESSARY, SUBGOALS.

If your long-range goal is to establish a required course teaching listening and speaking to each high school student in

the state/nation, there may be some subgoals. Some groundwork may be essential in order to achieve the big goal.

-- In West Virginia, we targeted the BOE's statement of educational philosophy and every state educational curricular document being developed for the inclusion of the skills of speaking and listening as basic skills. (see Donald Rubin, "Instruction in Speaking and Listening: Battles and Options," Educational Leadership, (February 1985), 31-35.)

-- Once, we planted SPEAKING AND LISTENING in the state's educational documents, we pursued the inclusion of a high school graduation requirement of a required speech class. For a while, we managed to get the BOE to insert the option of allowing 1/2 unit (one semester) of speech in place of English (subject to the discretion of each school) which has since been buried by administrative resistance, association apathy and my burnout. (Life and politics does go on.)

-- Our (WV) current campaign is to pursue the requirement of speaking and listening instruction of all students, and that that instruction should be given by certified oral communication teachers has received only limited Association action.

---------- DEVELOP A CAMPAIGN ----------

You must get at the DOE every way you can. So, you must BUILD a campaign.

-- BUILD a case --- speaking and listening are basic skills. (See the enclosed materials. My proofreading was not as good as it should have been: some people attacked the misspelled words, not the ideas. Can you find out how many speech classes are now being taught throughout the state? How many high school students are taking speech each year? (Sometimes, you can get this information from the DOE's own statistics.) How many college students have taken a speech class before college? (high school, junior high, boy scouts, Future Farmers... where?)

BUILD a network --- "NUMBERS COUNT!" ---

-- There are times when you must have numbers responding to specific targets in order to make a point. In some political situations, even with the BOE and the DOE, a show of numbers can make a decision or lose it. (In one instance, we lost a decision for want of a few more people writing a letter to the BOE: the letters were needed during final week just before Christmas, and some members were too busy. That hurts! That's life.

-- Your NETWORK needs to touch all geographic areas and all levels (or constituencies) of the state. Your targets will be counting how many from each area and level. You

must have one certain contact in each geographic area: someone you can depend upon to respond quickly if needed. This primary network is essential.

-- Each member of the primary network needs to develop a secondary network -- that is, interested and committed people (association members or not) who will support your goals if called on. These people are the ones to be called on for the major battles when the numbers will count. Pray for leadtime! (A 24 hour call limits your response. On the other hand, you don't want to call up the reserves too early, or they might forget.) This network must understand that they have to write their own letters. Form letters may be discounted or even thrown away. Neatly handwritten letters are generally preferred.

BUILD YOUR CONTACTS....

-- IDENTIFY the key people who could be involved in making the decision affecting your goal. Some of these people are going to be more important than others. Some of the most important people are not in the public positions. They may be DOE officials, legislative workers, or in a variety of positions: however, they can influence a vote.

-- IDENTIFY those politicians really involved in education.

-- Develop contacts with your targets. The larger your advocacy committee, the more contacts you can develop.

Usually these contacts will not be onetime communications, especially with the key people. Some relationships must be ongoing.

-- When you contact each target, you must have a concrete (very specific) action which you are proposing. A generalization, such as "more speech", is meaningless since it gives your target nothing to do. He or she will gladly say that he is in favor of mother, apple pie and more speech. That's as American as the right of free speech. Be succinct -- clear and to-the-point. Do not waste their time.

BUILD AN ADVOCACY CALENDAR.....

-- Government does not run on a school calendar The legislature and the bureaucracy have their own calendars. You cannot jump into a decision process at the last minute and expect to have any kind of influence on that decision. One of your first problems is learning how the process works. Is it an open process (public announcements and public hearings) or a closed process (when discovering what-actions-are-being-taken-by-whom is known only by a few)? Legislative action often begins long before the formal legislative session. Very often, legislative aides or DOE staff members are very helpful in learning how the process works. Ask questions. Most people are more than pleased to help.

-- When you learn the CALENDAR, you will then be able to plan your own action calendar. WARNING: very often, the actions of the DOE and the BOE are planned to fall on final exams, holidays, and major athletic events (which serve to minimize outside input). When the calendar is available in advance of such occasions, you can prepare to act early. Sometimes, a last-minute discovery of an impending action creates the need for overtime or even above-and-beyond-the-call-time. Without a calendar, you may always be a day-late and a dollar-short.

BUILD AN ACTION PLAN....

Once you have decided on your goals, you need to develop an action plan. There are a variety of strategies for undertaking an advocacy action (find some of the material on advocacy, lobbying, influence and political action).

We in West Virginia chose the Gideon principle: a few making a lot of noise, sounding like a lot. We employed a number of tactics:

1. Identifying which colleges in this state had a "speech for the teachers," "classroom communication" course or its equivalent (which were few).
2. Collected the number of high school classes and students in speech historically from DOE statistics.
3. Collected all the reports and studies about the state education system we could find. Some had statements about speaking and listening -- important quotes.
4. Developed a set of Recommended Oral Communication Competencies, Grades 9-12. With the assistance of a development grant from the Eastern Communication Association, we printed those recommendations and distributed them through the DOE, to every county superintendent, to every high school principal, to every school library, and to all identified speech teachers.
5. Developed a reiterative campaign correcting editors every time they used the term, "basic skills" without including speaking and listening.

6. Published an association newsletter, really aimed at the decision-makers, Printed and mailed the newsletter to all members, DOE staff, BOE members, all county superintendents, high school principals, and newspaper editors.
7. Collected key quotes about speaking and listening in education and had them printed in large letters on colored paper for impact reading. These signs have been distributed liberally throughout the state. (In the rush, my proofreading was poor, resulting in more comments about the typos than the content.)
8. Continually monitoring the DOE action from as many sources as possible for any curriculum action which will or might involve speaking and listening. The appropriate official or chairman would be contacted. This was a continuing process. (For a long time, the DOE expected our response and even contacted us.)
9. The association tries to maintain a list of the state association officers in the state education directory and in the state's blue book of information about the government and other organizations. These official directories contribute to the image of an association with substance. When officials ask, "Who are these people?" They can find out from the directories.

WHAT ELSE CAN BE DONE TO ACHIEVE OUR ASSOCIATION'S GOAL?

Association members need to become involved in the fortunes of politicians at the state and national level. Identify a legislator or congressman, join his/her campaign. When you establish a working connection with a politician, you can develop access to his/her ear. Then, you have a chance to influence legislation supporting the goals of this association.

Join in the process of developing the association's goals and action-plan. Once the plan is developed, support it with action when needed. REMEMBER THAT, IN SOME CASES, NUMBERS COUNT ... AND YOUR VOICE MAY MAKE THE DIFFERENCE.

Establishing and maintaining the place of listening in the vocabulary and consciousness of society is an on-going process, not the magical act of one brilliant voice on one grand day in the sun. Listening may find its place in the paradigm or myth of society more quickly through a carefully planned advocacy.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alinsky, Saul D.: Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

Angel, Dan: "Legislative Lobbying: It's Three-Dimensional," Community and Junior College Journal, 5: 2 (November 1980), 34-37.

Benoit, Andre: "A Note on Decision-Making Processes in the Policies of Education," Comparative Education Review, 19 (February 1975), 155-168.

Black, Theordore M.: "The Political Role of Educators," Education Digest, 64 (March 1977), 30-32.

Greenwald, Carol S.: Group Power: Lobbying and Public Policy. New York: Praeger, 1977.

Jamieson, G.H.: Communication and Persuasion. Chapter 14, "Resistance to Persuasion." London: Groom Helm, 1985.

Morshead, Richard W., "The Clash of Hidden Ideologies in Contemporary Education," Education Digest, 62 (November 1975), 16-19.

Ornstein, Allan C.: "The Politics of Accountability," Education Digest, 62 (December 1975), 6-9.

Parr, J. Gordon, "Prisoners of Inappropriate Technologies," Change Magazine, (April 1977), 8-10.

Ritter, Ellen M.: "Back to Basics" and Accountability in Secondary School Speech Education," Communication Education, 27 (March 1978), 119-126.

Waldrop, Ruth W.: "Simple Steps to Successful Legislation," School Media Quarterly. (Winter 1977), 85-94.